
U.S. Representative

John Spratt

South Carolina # 5th District

News Release

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Spratt Votes to Boost Veterans Benefits

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) today joined a majority of his House colleagues in voting to increase benefits for veterans. The House-passed bill authorizes annual cost-of-living increases for veterans' benefits, and disability compensation for additional Gulf War illnesses, among other provisions.

“This legislation will give veterans a number of added benefits they clearly deserve,” said Spratt, a senior member of the Armed Services Committee.

COLA: The bill authorizes an annual cost-of-living increase for VA benefits programs that would be equal to any increase in benefits under the Social Security Act, which is calculated based upon changes in the Consumer Price Index, effective Dec. 1, 2001. The Veterans Affairs Department estimates the COLA will be approximately 2.5%

Persian Gulf Illnesses: The bill authorizes the VA to provide disability compensation to Persian Gulf War veterans whose claims for chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, or other "hard to diagnose" illnesses have previously been denied. The bill also authorizes the VA to continue disability payments to Persian Gulf War veterans who participate in VA-sponsored medical research and who are subsequently diagnosed with a specific disease.

Other Provisions: The bill also:

- Adds diabetes mellitus (Type 2) to the list of service-connected benefits presumed for Vietnam Veterans;
- Authorizes the VA to pay unclaimed National Service Life Insurance and U.S. Government Life Insurance proceeds to an alternate beneficiary when the first beneficiary cannot be located within three years of the insured's death;
- Extends to 2005 the VA's direct loan language program for Native American veterans living on tribal trust lands;
- Modifies the requirement for loan assumption language in home loan documents;
- Requires the VA to establish a two-year pilot expansion of the available hours of the VA's toll-free telephone information service, and to assess the demand for the service;
- Extends to September 2006 the co-payment requirement for outpatient prescription medications;

- Allows the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to impose registration fees on persons participating in court-sponsored activities, including judicial conferences;
- Eliminates the requirement for veterans to furnish the VA with a copy of the notice of appeal filed with the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

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